

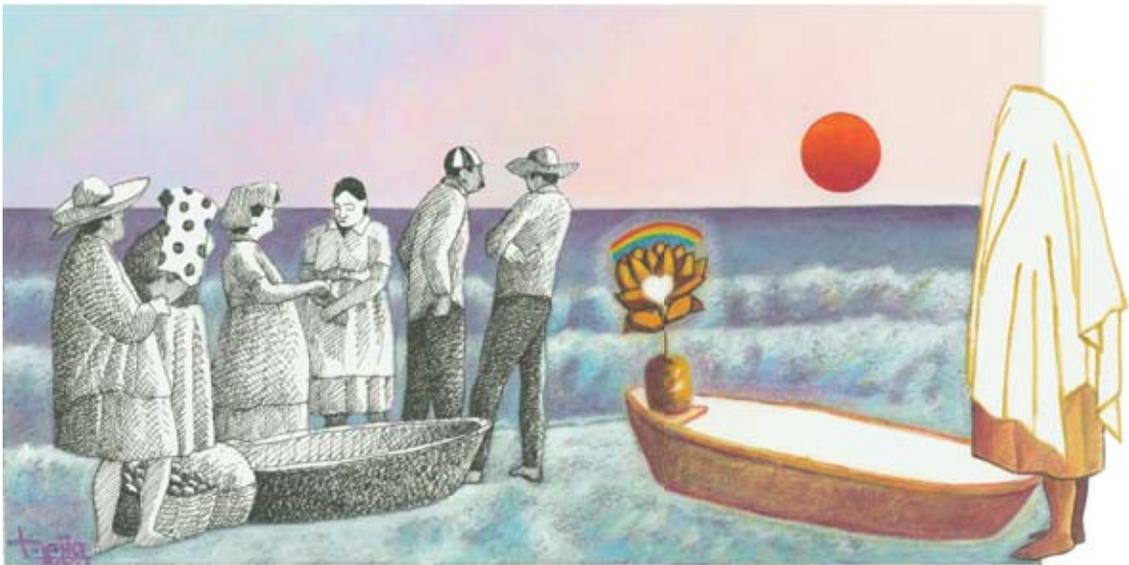
Developing Sustainability, Developing the Self

An Integral Approach to International and Community Development

Gail Hochachka

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By Gail Hochachka

Cover Image:

This painting, entitled, "Buscame donde el sol se besa con el mar", is by the renowned Salvadoran artist Mauricio Mejia. It illustrates the evolution of the community San Juan del Gozo in Jiquilisco Bay, El Salvador. The group of people on the left represents the community as it is now. The woman draped in white robes on the right represents what the community is becoming, which is yet unknown but slowly emerging. The artist sees "community" and "feminine" to have a similar symbolic meaning, and thus he has depicted the emergent community as a woman. In the middle of the painting, the process of integral community development is symbolized as a small plant that is guided by heart and vision. The emergent community waits patiently on the right, as the process slowly reveals her.



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About the Author

Gail Hochachka is a Research Associate with the POLIS Project on Ecological Governance, at the University of Victoria. She also co-directs the Integral International Development Center of Integral University, and founded the non-profit organization Drishti—Centre for Integral Action. Through these various organizations, she does research, consulting, teaching, and projects in community and international development. She lives in Smithers, BC, Canada, and can be contacted at gail@drishti.ca.



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To my Dad

who showed me

a way of thinking beyond discrete disciplines,

always exploring the next highest

horizon.

Acknowledgements

Upon completion of this booklet, I turn to look back upon the entire process and results. The view that I have, after eight months of applied research in El Salvador, an equal amount of time engaged in theoretical and analytical inquiry, and a year of workshops and writing on the topic, is one of incredulous surprise and gratitude. For the process and outcomes of this work, I am indebted to the support from many individuals, organizations, and institutions.

The concept and vision of the project came from blending the conservation objectives of the CESTA-Amigos de la Tierra, with Ken Wilber's work on Integral Theory and the academic approach of the Eco-Research Chair of Environmental Law and Policy, School for Environmental Studies at the University of Victoria (UVic). Much appreciated financial support came from the International Development Research Centre's John G. Bene Fellowship, Community Forestry: Trees and People. With the vision of the Bene Fellowship, we looked intently and deeply into the linkages between local peoples and their surrounding forest ecosystems, with the firm belief that socio-economic, cultural and ecological needs can and should unite with community development objectives. IDRC also provided funding for this booklet to be translated and printed. I thank IDRC for this support, for allowing this research to become manifest and be disseminated. These grants have been key catalysts that have enabled sustainable development work to begin and to continue in the mangrove forests and communities of Jiquilisco Bay, El Salvador.

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Executive Summary

This booklet explores former and current approaches to development, integrating previous practices to move into new arenas of action and inquiry. It suggests that development involves personal, collective and systemic transformation, and that to engage effectively in this requires a broader and deeper understanding of development — broader in terms of including qualitative and interior needs of humans, and deeper to more adequately understand individual and collective transformation itself.

Features of Developing Sustainability

People all over the world realize that *sustainable development* is limited in its definition and scope, and many suggest it is better understood and practiced as a dynamic process of *developing sustainability* involving personal, collective and systemic transformation. Current development practices have various methodologies and tools for fostering systemic and collective shifts toward sustainability, such as community-based natural resource management, the sustainable livelihoods approach, participatory rural appraisals and multi-stakeholder conflict resolution, to name a few.

Fewer tools exist in the area of personal transformation in development. Research in this area explains that human societies come closer to sustainability as people's worldviews encompass and care for a broader group of others — other people, families, species, communities and ecosystems. Other development practitioners have called this personal empowerment, self-realization and

liberation, and it includes shifts in worldviews and ways of thinking about one's self and others. This component of personal transformation is often a critical success factor in a development intervention. For example, local ownership of a development intervention requires a level of self-esteem and leadership that is arrived via personal empowerment. Thus, the process of developing sustainability also includes developing the self — as community people, development practitioners, government officials, theorists and leaders.

Working with Interiority

Increasingly, development practitioners recognize that people's interiority (feelings, beliefs, worldviews) influence and inform development interventions. For example, low self-worth from decades of oppression may thwart participatory processes to foster sustainable livelihoods; or, disaster relief efforts remain partial, or even futile, without also addressing the psychological trauma of victims. Yet working with interiority is not an easy or usual endeavor. As interiority is inherently subjective, some critiques suggest that to work with it compromises scientific rigor, and thus it is often excluded from development projects.

How to work with interiority remains a gap in our collective knowledge on development. I suggest that to be effective and ethical in such work requires a better understanding of interiority, more capacity to work with intangible needs, and a way to integrate quantitative and qualitative methodologies for addressing this broad spectrum of human needs.

Yet, this raises further questions: What types of methodologies can span both interior and exterior aspects of development? How can practitioners better understand the processes of personal empowerment and social transformation in relation to systemic change? What would local ownership, participation and capacity development be like if practitioners acknowledged and worked with interiority? These are pertinent questions for the emerging inquiry in development — ones that are taken up in this booklet.

An Integral Approach

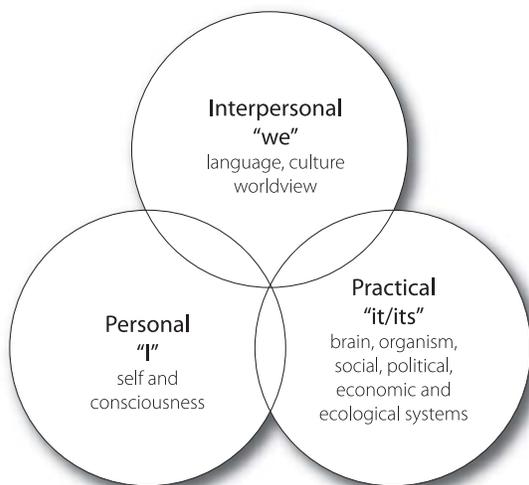


diagram 1: An Integral Approach

An integral approach to international development offers some insight into these questions. The integral approach integrates existing development methodologies with emerging tools for personal, collective and systemic transformation, by including the areas of **Personal** (psychology and worldviews), **Interpersonal** (traditions, customs and social norms), and **Practical** (social, political, economic and ecological systems) in one framework of practice. (see diagram 1). Each area has its own

domain of action and inquiry, its own set of methodologies and tools, and perhaps its own set of specialists and experts, all brought together within one approach.

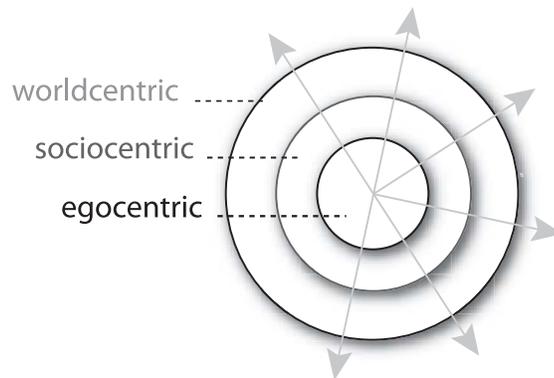


diagram 2: shifts in world views

An integral approach draws upon moral, psychological and cognitive research to better understand and work with human interiority. This is particularly important for working with worldviews. A simplified sketch of self-development processes explains that as an individual's sphere of consideration and care expands to include others beyond oneself, and as that person acts in concert with others who also share this expanded worldview, the closer the community or society comes to sustainability. In this way, worldviews move from being self-focused and **egocentric**, to include others in the social group, or **sociocentric**, to eventually include other humans, species and ecosystems in a **worldcentric** embrace (diagram 2). Therefore, self-care, care for others, and universal care are all contained within a worldcentric perspective.

Since shifts in worldviews take time and are often rare, another important way of working with worldviews is to appropriately translate key messages about development

into the worldviews or frames of reference that people hold. Translating to local worldviews not only enables development interventions to be “heard” by local people, but also enables community people to infuse their own cultural meaning into development work and to engage in that work in ways that correspond with local traditions and ways of thinking.

Practical Application in El Salvador

The last half of the booklet discusses the practical application of an integral approach to community development, drawing upon a detailed case study from El Salvador. The case study reports how participatory action research embedded in an integral framework helped to foster sustainability in ways that honored the existing worldviews and acknowledged the socioeconomic and psycho-cultural realities in the community. The study is only a snapshot of a larger and more vibrant story of social change in Jiquilisco Bay. Yet it offers a beginning point for further inquiry, dialogue and practice of an integral approach to developing sustainability. Those involved in development — such as, consultants, civil society organizations, donors, research centres, cooperatives, community people, etc. — are invited to join in this inquiry.

Introduction

Again: we have not been able to create viable models of development, models that correspond to what we are. Up to now development has been the opposite of what the word means: to open out that which is rolled up, to unfold, to grow freely and harmoniously. Indeed development has been in a straitjacket. It is a false liberation.

O. Paz[1]

Eradication of hunger and poverty is not merely an intellectual exercise of science, technology or economics, but also involves an inner change. To alter the system, it is necessary to alter the paradigm of development, and to take cognizance of the spiritual, of the inner voice, of the ethics and values that promote sustainable development.

K. Chowdhry[2]

With eyes that shine and a posture that is proud, regardless of the dirt floor of her kitchen, she tells me how her family is disintegrating. My friend and colleague, Maria[3], is a leader in her community, and today she has tears on her cheeks. Her eldest son has fled El Salvador with five other youth to the Guatemalan border, then on to Mexico and the United States. This is a dangerous and clandestine route that many people take, without knowing what awaits them, or even if they will arrive. And when they leave, a gaping hole remains in their families and their communities.

The two-sided coin of their motivation is as much about honour as it is economics. Jobs for the poor can be found in El

Salvador, although they hardly cover daily expenses and often require rural people to move to urban centres. The work itself is not often dignified, nor does it provide purpose and meaning for employees. Work is about a paycheck, but it is also about fulfillment, engaging one's mind in new ways, employing a variety of skills for one's society, and many other intangibles that make a job satisfying. Maria's son left to find opportunities for more meaningful, and more adequately paid, work.

Those who leave the country take with them their motivation, creativity, skills and capacities —the very ingredients that are necessary for community development. Having worked with Maria's community since 2000, I have witnessed several community leaders leave for the north. And, it is particularly heart wrenching to hear that youth are leaving as well. As I sit with my friend in the afternoon sun, I realize that this is not just a "brain drain" as it is sometimes referred to; it is a draining of the very essence of this community and country.

Understanding the Context

Talking with her, my mind analyzes the situation, considering how "development" efforts, however well intentioned, have let these people down. The GDP of El Salvador suggests that the country is doing well —there has been a growth rate of 4-5% a year since 1992, there are more factory jobs in the free trade zones, more foreign investment attracted by dollarization in 2001, and apparently more work available for the poor. Yet, according to UNDP Human Development Report for El Salvador (Rodriguez, 2001; pp 1-3, 10-11), inequality in income distribution remains one of the most pronounced in the world (where 20%

of the wealthiest receive 18 times that of the poorest 20%), minimum wage is lower than what it was in 1996, and civil violence is still rampant, making the country one of the most violent and insecure in the world. Moreover, El Salvador's environment is heavily degraded, due to its small size, high population density and poverty — after Haiti, it is the second most deforested country in the Western Hemisphere.[4] International economists and civil society groups agree that development in El Salvador has been neither equitable nor sustainable, and El Salvador is only one example of many other countries.[5]

The past six decades have been an experiment, an exploration, or a search for a clearer understanding of what development is — economic development, social development, human development, sustainable development, developing sustainability, and onward. What do we need as individuals and groups to not only survive but also to thrive? Various paradigms of “development” have attempted to answer that question, and, taken together, they offer a map that brings into focus the outcomes, successes and failures of each. Every era has seen a slightly different concept and practice of “development”, which have morphed into new iterations through continual refinement and improvement.

A Shared Path

When I first became involved in international development work, some people would say to me, *“Why don't you just leave southern countries alone to fix their own problems?”* I knew they were right. ...and they were also wrong. Just that one sentence brings to light the complexity and ethics of development; it uncovers the underbelly of development and foreign aid, pointing to the cultural barriers, moral issues and epistemological bias of many “development” practices over the decades. Today, the gap between haves and have-nots remains astoundingly wide, and poverty is now exacerbated by current ecological crises that greatly increase the vulnerability of poor communities. The need for work in sustainable development is apparent more than ever. Development work has not been a perfect journey over the past six decades — it has been a learning process that folds back on itself, inches forward, stumbles into dead ends... and we still have a lot to learn. Is it really so simple to “just leave developing countries alone”?

Turning one's back will not make these issues go away. Whether we turn our back or engage, we are still part of the problems and solutions. Global economic and political



Cairo, Egypt

institutions have grown to become systemic barriers to moving beyond poverty and toward sustainability — the root causes are deep and are shared by all. Solutions need to be found in a co-creative way, such that, in the north and south, we all do our part to give rise to equity and sustainability worldwide.

Thus, rather than posing the question whether one should do development work at all, the question might be better phrased as, *“how can we, as a global community, address such issues as poverty, equity, health, wellbeing and sustainability better?”*

That question is now becoming more and more important in the development sector; not seeking to find a “sustainable development”, but rather to engage in a process of “developing sustainability”. Sustainable development stems from a neoclassical economic system and ethnocentric definition of development — the underlying problems at the core of this model remain unquestioned. Developing sustainability, on the other hand, conveys a renewed theory and practice that fundamentally questions the causes of unsustainability, takes direction from communities, local cultures and livelihoods, and links to the international policies for sustainability. It allows for diverse expression of what sustainability looks like in different places, and with this renewed conception, “development” is understood as a process, an unfolding, towards sustainability. The challenge, today, remains in the implementation. How does this work? How can it work best?

Innovative Falling Forward

This booklet is part of this on-going exploration of what works in which contexts

and why; an exploration that acknowledges the complexity of interrelated issues involved in developing sustainability. In a workshop at the Canadian International Development Agency in December 2003 entitled *Building Knowledge in Partnership for Policy Influence* was put very well:

There are no right answers to development — we must always make sure that we are ‘falling forward’, not falling backward. [and] Innovation is critical to ‘falling forward’...

As a global community, we truly are engaged in an innovative “falling forward” when it comes to development. This booklet goes to the edges of this evolving understanding of development. It explores how developing sustainability is more effective when the process is participatory and infused with local meaning; how participation is most effective when it fosters empowerment; and how empowerment quintessentially involves personal, collective and systemic transformation. To engage effectively in this process of transformation requires a broader and deeper understanding of development — broader in terms of including qualitative and interior needs of humans, and deeper to more adequately understand individual and collective transformation itself.

With this booklet, I invite the reader to join in an exploration of how we can refine and build on our work to develop sustainability, specifically relating to community development in a larger context of global issues. There are no right answers... yet. We are building them together.

Explorations in Practice

In 2000-2002, I worked with the community of San Juan del Gozo, El Salvador, using participatory action research to pursue this line of inquiry. I worked in collaboration with an environmental non-governmental organization (ENGO) CESTA (Salvadoran Centre for Appropriate Technology) for 8 months as part of my MA in Environmental Studies at the University of Victoria, BC, Canada (5 months in 2000-2001; 3 months in 2001-2002).

My methodology was embedded in an integral framework. An integral framework makes space for building relationships, cultivating trust between participants, and acknowledging the role of worldviews and value-systems in a community-directed approach to development. These interior domains of development are also combined with work done in socioeconomic systems,

natural ecosystems, health, education and behaviours of individuals. This booklet is based on the research in San Juan del Gozo, and discusses an integral approach to community development in El Salvador specifically, with implications for developing sustainability internationally.

Through my work in El Salvador, it became clear that “development” includes not only economic growth and built infrastructure, but also the degree to which individuals in a society are able to access, and act from, an expansive and inter-connected worldview. Development involves creating a space to explore concerns, ideas and goals, and to really hear each other’s situation, values and stories. Community development work needs to include these “interior” needs of individuals and groups, such as personal empowerment, self-esteem and healthy interpersonal dynamics, in addition to addressing economic, social and ecological needs. For a development practitioner, it



Isla de Mendez, El Salvador

requires being able to access deeper modes of awareness (ie. less egocentric and anthropocentric) and being able to let go of personal and/or professional agendas to take direction from the community in addressing local concerns, while simultaneously holding an encompassing vision for the work at hand.

Thus, the integral approach includes the interiority of communities — namely personal wellbeing and cultural integrity — with the more common objectives of economic security and environmental sustainability, and also works with the transformative processes of personal empowerment and social change.

The framework provides enough breadth and depth to include and appropriately employ a vast number of development objectives, indicators and methodologies, making it unique in the development field.

development practitioners and international development experts. The response from these groups suggests that the topic is timely, intriguing, and necessary for community development.

Such an approach is timely considering the need to sufficiently meet the economic, social and ecological needs of communities worldwide, which are only increasing in the face of the economic globalization. It is intriguing in that it recognizes how human needs span not only the economic, social and ecological, but also the cultural, psychological and spiritual. And thus seeks ways to integrate current development methodologies with other disciplines, particularly transformative learning, action research, developmental psychology and liberation theology, to provide a more complete understanding of intangibles and interiority in development. The term interiority refers to psychology and epistemologies, ethics and morals, values and worldviews, and religion and spirituality.

Emerging Interest

Over the past year, I have presented my preliminary research on an integral approach to international and community development in workshops and presentations with audiences as diverse as students, professors, youth interns, colleagues in both the North and South, activists, consultants, research associates, community

— • —

The integral approach includes ... personal wellbeing and cultural integrity [as well as] economic security and environmental sustainability, and also works with the transformative processes of personal empowerment and social change.

— • —

Two other IDRC publications have explored the links between development and interiority.[6] Both publications describe an integrated approach to development that recognizes the role that worldviews and beliefs have in development practices, and thus bring divergent disciplines together in a more comprehensive approach to analyzing and working in development. These previous writings have focused on international

development, drawing upon various spiritual disciplines and psychological frameworks.

Throughout the 1990s, some development agencies, programs and foundations began to attune to the need for such an integrated approach to development. For example, iSchaik Development Associates — consultants for UNICEF, The World Bank, The UKs Department of International Development (DFID), and the European Union — have used an integrally-informed approach since 1995 (Brown, 2004, in press).[7] Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) held a conference on spirituality and sustainable development in 1996 entitled *Dialogue on Spirituality in Sustainable Development*.^[8] It is increasingly common to open conferences or events on topics relating to international and community development with a prayer or blessing, and some academic conferences are explicitly exploring how “spirit matters” in community development, adult education and environmental work.^[9] The Kellogg Foundation, a private foundation based in the US with grant-making programs for international development, describes in its values statement for their Latin American program how “the richness and energy of life are determined by the synergy of mind, body, and spirit”.^[10] The UNDP Human Development Report (1993, p. 8) reiterates:

The implications of placing people at the centre of political and economic change are profound. They challenge traditional concepts of security, old models of development, ideological debates on the role of the market and outmoded forms of international cooperation. They call for nothing less than a revolution in our thinking.

These examples point to an emerging

recognition across the field that calls for a transformation in how we think about development, and how we work in it, both as participants and practitioners. With a focus on practical methodologies at the community level, this booklet builds on this dialogue and complements these previous books that focused on national and international spheres. The case study in the latter half of the booklet focuses on community development, but the integral approach described here could also be applied in national, regional, bioregional and international contexts.

Overview of the Booklet

In Chapter One, I discuss “development” as a larger concept, tracing the paradigms and practices of development from conventional to alternative approaches. These alternative approaches have participation and empowerment at their theoretical core. They refute mainstream development’s treatment of local people as mere recipients of top-down, Euro-centric planning, and rather, seek to empower local people as the initiators and leaders of their own development process. While this is noble, it is not always effective (Randel, et al. 2004). In the final part of Chapter One, I discuss how participatory development methodologies can be more effective (i.e. more sustained and empowering), with a deeper understanding of the intangible, interior aspects to development.

In Chapter Two, I describe how an integral approach to community development can address these issues of meaningful, sustained participation. An integral approach recognizes that working with the interiority of groups and individuals is necessary for participants to feel committed to, and

empowered by, a participatory process. This is not a new approach per se — other approaches may implicitly include these interior aspects to development. The integral framework builds on previous approaches to explicitly bring together both tangible and intangible (or exterior and interior) aspects to community development, such as economic security and environmental sustainability as well as worldviews, personal growth, beliefs, and self-development of participants and practitioners. Using this transdisciplinary approach provides ways to tailor participatory methodology to meet the needs of local people, in terms of their own unique situations, values, worldviews and capacities for community development. The last half of this chapter offers short case studies (past and present) of other integrative community development projects in other parts of the world.

In Chapter Three, I draw upon my own work in San Juan del Gozo, El Salvador as a more in-depth case study, focusing on the methodologies and outcomes of using an integral framework for community development. I worked with two focus groups — women and fisherfolk — in a community-directed and participatory process, through which we identified and explored the community's key concerns. Each part of the methodology involved both interior and exterior dimensions, reflecting the intangible and tangible processes and outcomes. Chapter Four continues with an analysis of the results and process of this case study, with implications for integral community development more generally. I offer a short conclusion in Chapter Five.

While this research is only a preliminary foray into the potential of an integral approach to community development, it seeks to stimulate further refinement

of the approach, inquires into the nature and process of “development”, and offers an important piece to the international development mosaic. My intention is to offer something useful to the practice of development, inspired by my experiences and friendships in El Salvador. I invite the reader to participate in this inquiry, both in theory and practice, offering insights to this on-going evolution of international and community development practices.

Numerous concepts exist about what “development” is, how it should be carried out, and even whether, being a Western construct, the process should be called development at all.[11] Most likely, the number of concepts and forms of development exceed the number of people, institutions and entities asking questions related to the process of societal change.

At its essence, “development” refers to a process in which human groups move from a current state (e.g., organizational and socioeconomic structure) to another one — perhaps one that is more productive or more affluent, perhaps more able to care for its members, and/or perhaps more equitable and ecologically sustainable — in a continuous process of societal growth. This process of change will include (among others) shifts in how goods and services are produced, marketed and sold, in the manner social systems are organized, in the ways people value and view the world around them, and in how people treat one another.